

WHAT IS EVANGELICAL PRETERISM?

by Charles S. Meek

Evangelical Preterists hold to the basic First Things doctrines of the Christian faith, which can be summarized as follows:

1. **The Nature of God:** God is creator and sustainer of the universe. He is a Trinity—one God manifested in three, eternally co-existent “persons”—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are of the same nature and essence as God the Father (consistent with the Nicene Creed), though lower in role and rank.

2. **The Nature of Man:** All men are sinful and fall short of the glory of God.

3. **How Sinful Man is Reconciled to a Holy God:** the gospel. We are saved by God’s grace through a living, penitent, trusting faith in Jesus Christ alone—because of Christ’s perfect earthly life, his substitutionary death to pay the penalty for our sin, his resurrection to provide the hope for our own eternal life, and his Parousia to seal our salvation in covenantal completion of all that was promised in the Old and New Testaments.

4. **The Bible:** The Bible is inspired by God, that is—it is God’s Word from Genesis to Revelation. Accordingly, we submit to Scripture when it declares in over 100 passages of the New Testament that the so-called “last days” were in the 1st century, culminating with the end of the Old Covenant Age in AD 70. At that time Jerusalem and the temple were decimated, the important genealogical records were destroyed, and the ancient Jewish system of sacrifices for sin ceased forever.

5. **The Doctrine of Heaven:** Heaven is where believers spend eternity after life on earth, consistent with Jesus’ numerous promises of eternal life. Christians have always understood heaven to be the “place” where believers will abide with God in a status better than we have here on earth. Heaven is the hope of the believer.

6. **Our obligation:** In response to God’s grace, we humbly and honestly seek to obey Him as best we understand his will. In the very broadest of terms, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—and to love our neighbor (even our enemies). Our compassion demands that we work to bring as many people into a saving relationship with Christ.

However, regarding Bible prophecy, i.e. “Last Things,” we are persuaded that that the modern majority views are mistaken. Indeed, while we do not take this charge lightly, we believe that most churches are teaching error about the last days and “Second Coming.” The view to which we hold is referred to as *preterism*, from a Latin word meaning “past.” This is the view that was taught by Jesus and the New Testament writers, who understood that they themselves were living in the “last days”—not some future generation. Christians need to return to the pages of the Old and New Testament for a correct understanding of the last things. Thus:

- We are compelled to believe, in spite of popular opinions on eschatology, that Jesus was telling the truth when He stated in numerous places that all prophecy would be fulfilled in his generation (examples: Matthew 10:23; 16:27-28; 23:36; 24:34; 26:64; Mark 8:38-9:1; Luke 21:22, 32; Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6-20; etc.).
- We further understand that the “last days” or “end times” were the last days of the Old Covenant order that ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. Out of some 14 or more mentions of the last days/end times in the New Testament, the culmination of none of them can be placed outside of the first century (examples: Acts 2:14-20; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; 10:11; Hebrews 1:2; 9:26; 1 Peter 1:5, 20; 4:7, 17; 1 John 2:17-18; etc.)

We specifically reject: aberrant doctrines of millennialism (especially dispensationalism, which we think is a different gospel), fideism, nominalism, antinomianism, liberalism, legalism, and universalism. And we specifically and forcefully reject the errors of “hyper-preterism,” which include: (a) the idea that God no longer judges people after AD 70, (b) that God’s soteriological (salvific) workings ended in AD 70, (c) that man’s sin is no longer an issue after AD 70, (d) the “Collective Body View” (CBV) of resurrection—that resurrection is nothing more than corporate justification of Israel, thus over-spiritualizing resurrection such that heaven is on earth, or that heaven offers nothing better than what we have on earth, (e) that Christians must necessarily give up the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper after AD 70.

Thus, while we believe that all eschatological promises were fulfilled in AD 70—including the Parousia, the great judgment, and the general resurrection—we believe that the workings of God continue past AD 70. Christ’s work in the first century was a beginning, not an end. Thus, the SOTERIOLOGICAL PROMISES (that is, the promises of salvation) of the Bible continue into the world without end as Christ reigns victorious NOW (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33; Ephesians 3:21). Man’s sinful nature did not end in AD 70, thus our ongoing need from salvation, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. While we recognize that theological errors have been present in the

ancient faith (who among us does not make errors?), we believe that it is important to remain connected to the lineage of classical Christianity, uniting on the First Things doctrines above. Christianity is an historical faith, and we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.

So, what did happen in the first century? The Bible is clear that Christ's death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins (Romans 8:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Hebrews 9:15-26, etc.). And his resurrection provided our hope for eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:1-11, etc.).

Nevertheless, the Bible teaches us that our Lord's work of redemption and salvation was completed at the Parousia—Christ's effectual divine presence in AD 70 (Luke 21:28; Romans 13:11-12; Hebrews 1:14 note *mello* "about to" in literal translations; Hebrews 9:26-28; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Revelation 12:10; etc.). Effectively, this sealed the salvation of all believers into the future. Thus, the fulfillment of the eschatological last-things promises ELEVATES the importance of the never-ending New Covenant First Things, which were ushered in once-for-all with Christ.

CONCLUSION: Fulfillment of biblical prophecy enhances our understanding of classical Christianity, it does not detract from it.

You are invited to see reviews and details of my book *CHRISTIAN HOPE THROUGH FULFILLED PROPHECY: IS YOUR CHURCH TEACHING ERROR ABOUT THE LAST DAYS AND SECOND COMING?* at Amazon.com. Also, to learn more about apologetics, theology, and eschatology, check out my websites listed below. (To receive all of our posts from the two Facebook sites, "like" the site, then hover over the "Liked" symbol and click on "Get Notifications.")

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